DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 109 162 TM 004 609

AUTHOR Olson, Ruth Anne Aldrich
TITLE Supportive Evaluation of Marcy School.
INSTITUTION Minneapolis Public Schools, Minn. Southeast Alternatives Program.
PUB DATE 13 Sep 74
NOTE 10p.; For related documents, see TM 004 262, 269, 273, 276, 301 and 323; Not available in hard copy due to marginal legibility of original document

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.76 PLUS POSTAGE HC Not Available from EDRS
DESCRIPTORS *Educational Alternatives; Educational Change; *Feedback; *Formative Evaluation; Interaction Process Analysis; Observation; *Open Education; Program Evaluation; Social Organizations; Social Relations; Student Behavior; Teacher Behavior
IDENTIFIERS Minneapolis Public Schools; *Southeast Alternatives

ABSTRACT

The internal evaluator at Marcy Open School has the responsibility for developing support services, such as identifying problems and posing solutions, as part of a formative evaluation effort. The evaluator might alter the use of space and storage of materials in the classroom, suggest that excessive adult interruptions tend to reduce classroom productivity, or design activities to reduce classroom tension. Also, she contributes to school wide decisions, such as whether the age-range of 5-11 facilitates school goals. The support of positive change toward a better program is seen as the domain of the evaluator. (BJG)

****
* Documents acquired by ERIC include many informal unpublished *
* materials not available from other sources. ERIC makes every effort *
* to obtain the best copy available. nevertheless, items of marginal *
* reproducibility are often encountered and this affects the quality *
* of the microfiche and hardcopy reproductions ERIC makes available *
* via the ERIC Document Reproduction Service (EDRS). EDRS is not *
* responsible for the quality of the original document. Reproductions *
* supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made from the original. *
****

ED109162

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

Southeast Alternatives Internal Evaluation Team
Tuttle School-Room 207
1042 18th Ave. S.E.
Minneapolis, MN. 55413

SUPPORTIVE EVALUATION OF MARCY SCHOOL

September 13, 1974

by

Ruth Anne Aldrich Olson, Evaluator

Clerical: Liz Pilman
Lois Caswell

TM 004 609 BEST COPY AVAILABLE

This is a Southeast Alternatives Level I evaluation report. Contact Ruth Anne Aldrich Olson, evaluator, for further information.

Preface

The first priority of the Southeast Alternatives Internal Evaluation Team is to provide information to program decision-makers (teachers, administrators, parents, and students). This feedback allows them to make informed decisions on modifications to improve programs. As the yearly evaluation plans are designed, each intra-school evaluator has time allocated specifically to respond to evaluation requests that may arise during that year (especially requests from individual teachers).

Because the results of these efforts are usually reported back only to the person or group who requested the service, many people are unaware of the types of requests which are typically accommodated. This report represents an attempt to describe the types of requests which have been accommodated in Marcy Open School. It is our hope that these examples will be of use to those persons who are involved in establishing evaluation services in schools as illustrations of the types of services which teachers and others have found useful.

A. Thel Kocher,
Evaluation Manager

SUPPORTIVE EVALUATION OF MARCY SCHOOL

In September, 1974, Marcy Elementary School became Marcy Open School. To do so meant a change of roles for all participants - children, teachers, administrators, and even parents. Resources were devoted early in the year to defining the goals for children and there was a relatively clear picture of the qualities which teachers and parents wanted to enhance in children. There was at best, however, only a very vague picture of what kinds of structures might lead to the achievement of those goals.

It soon became clear that evaluation could provide a vital service in helping participants "see" what was happening in the program - both on the level of individual classrooms and on the level of school-wide organizational structures. An internal evaluator was assigned to the building to develop those support services as part of the formative evaluation effort.

CLASSROOM SUPPORT

The expectation of sweeping role changes drew heavily upon the physical, intellectual and emotional resources of classroom teachers. At various times individuals would have a sense that something was not going right, but the multitudinous demands on teacher time and attention often prevented them from standing back and clearly defining the problem and possible solutions. The evaluator was in a position to provide that kind of service to the teachers.

A process was developed whereby the teacher would describe her concern, in as much detail as possible, to the evaluator. Together they would estimate what information might have the most value to the teacher. The evaluator would collect that information, report it back in detail to the teacher, and the teacher could determine how she might use the information to modify her classroom.

Examples of the process are described further as they centered around teacher concerns for use of space, the role of the teacher, the behavior of particular children, and the progress of classroom activities.

Use of Space

An open curriculum requires rearrangements of space in the classroom. Some guidelines can be given for that rearrangement, but much depends upon the architectural resources of the particular classroom, the style of the individual teacher, and the interests and needs of the children. How that space is arranged, and what materials are placed within particular areas have a profound effect on what activities take place and how the people within the room interact with one another.

One teacher noted that conflicts ofen erupted among certain children. She was able to stand back from the situation enough to determine that they often happened in one area of the room, and she described the situation to the evaluator. The evaluator observed that area during several half-hour periods scattered over two days. She recorded who was there, what they were doing, what materials they were using, and the specific situation which surrounded any conflicts. From those observations, it became clear that certain materials stored in that part of the room were essential to two very different kinds of activities - some quiet and some fairly active in nature. The result was that kids were quite simply getting in each others way. The teacher concluded that by dispersing materials to other areas of the room, the activities would also disperse and thereby eliminate the source of the conflict. In this particular situation, then, the use of space and storage of materials was identified as the crux of the problem.

Other observations related to use of space have examined traffic flow; arrangements of quiet, messy, large meeting and small group areas; and the ways that individual children relate to and use spaces.

Role of the Teacher

The teacher in an open school has a role that is vastly different from that for which he has most likely been trained in traditional teacher-training,

and from that which he has probably experienced in previous teaching situations. Some of those differences are readily perceived and easy to adjust to. Others cause peripheral problems that can cause confusion and frustration until they can be defined.

A sense of frustration developed for one teacher in feeling that she never seemed to accomplish the things with kids that she wanted to in any given day. The evaluator observed in her room during two-hour time-blocks of time over a period of two days, recording what the teacher was doing and with whom she was doing it. The information was summarized and presented to the teacher, who was uncomfortable with the amount of time which was centered around managing children and managing or interacting with other adults who came into the room for various purposes. She was able to understand where her sense of frustration came from and to make some modifications in her activities to cut down on the amount of "managing." Eventually, in fact, many teachers in the building became aware of the problem of large numbers of adult interruptions and steps were taken which alleviated the problem.

Observing teacher behavior can clearly be a threatening process. Consequently, the number of requests in this area have been more limited in number and it is seen as a long-range process.

Behavior of Children

By far the greatest number of requests have been for observing children's behavior. In any classroom situation there are often children about whom an adult is concerned. The concern may be centered around aggressive behavior, lack of involvement, withdrawal, or other behaviors. Marcy teachers are particularly aware that it is impossible to make any generalizations concerning the cause of various behaviors, and that it is essential to understand the individual causes before one can define any solutions. Though the teacher

might often be aware of the behavior which was the cause of concern, the multitudinous demands on time and attention made it impossible for the teacher to stand back to assess the causes. The evaluator could provide that service.

For example, in one classroom very early in the school year, the teacher was concerned about the disruptive behavior of a group of students, and asked for some help from the evaluator. After several half-hour observations, the evaluator was able to describe to the teacher the behaviors and interactions of the children involved, i.e., who was acting in what way to/with whom, the circumstances under which they seemed to disrupt others, etc. On the basis of that information the teacher was able to design activities which would help the children themselves identify what they seemed to be seeking from one another and to ease the tension among them.

Classroom Activities

An informal classroom demands that several things are happening at one time. Some of those things are structured by the teacher and others are suggested and structured by the children. It is sometimes hard to know what is going to happen with a particular activity, as different children will respond differently to the same set of materials or the same directions. With primary-aged children, particularly, it is important that the teacher be able to perceive where their interests are taking them and to provide those things which will extend those interests. Children are often unable to put a label on what intrigues them. They are often unable to name particular materials which might allow them to pursue those intrigues.

Most primary classrooms at Marcy are furnished with sand tables. The uses to which those tables are put, however, are extremely varied. At the beginning of a school year, particularly, it can be useful for the evaluator to observe play in the sand and to describe that in detail to the teacher. Extensive tunneling and mounding, for example, might suggest the introduction of molds and

the availability of small cars and trucks to drive through the tunnels. Sifting and measuring might lead to comparing the volume of containers of various sizes and shapes if those are made available. Building of cities or battlegrounds in the sand might be guided by making available particular materials. It can be difficult for the teacher to be aware of much more than "sand play" when there are so many things to which attention must be paid. The evaluator can support teaching efforts by describing the nature of such "play."

The evaluator has also observed children's movement in and out of activities, identified factors which seem to lead to lack of interest in particular activities and the nature of activities which seem to spring spontaneously from children. At this point it is essential to point out that a great deal depends upon the evaluator's skill as an observer. Various observation scales or categorization schemes are available, but have very limited value for the tasks as described, for they tend to impose themselves on what is being observed. That is, the observer can very easily be drawn to looking for behaviors which will fit into the categories as they have been developed in that scheme.

Instead, it is important to begin with a general sense of what is happening, to record as much of the behavior as possible, and to see the categories or generalizations which emerge out of the situation. This requires not only a fast writer (or some form of shorthand), but also a keen awareness of body language and interactions. Thus, in observing an individual child, noting the situations under which he tenses or withdraws may be as important as writing down the words he says. Noticing when a child chooses to enter and leave an activity may be as revealing as the nature of the activity which she chooses. Skill and sensitivity as an observer cannot be underplayed.

SCHOOL-WIDE DECISIONS

Just as important as what happens in the individual classroom, are the organizational structures which support the classroom. In an innovative

program, however, there are no clear pictures of what those stuctures might best be.

During Marcy's first year as an open school, it became clear from staff, children, and parents, that the original structure (including the grouping of children, arranging of activities, and the divisions of time) was serving as a major hindrance in achieving the goals which had been defined. The school was reorganized in December. The new organization smoothed things, considerably, but by April there was growing uncertainty about whether this new organization was "best" or whether more modification should take place in planning for the next year.

Concern centered around the way that children were grouped into classrooms. Groups consisted of two teachers, two classrooms, and approximately sixty children, ages 5 - 11. There were many questions about whether such an age-range of children was best for facilitating the goals of the school. The evaluator and the counselor collected information which would aid decision-makers toward an informed decision.

Extensive observations were conducted to record the interactions of children with each other and with adults in the classroom. These were categorized according to ages of the children and the nature of the interaction. Sociograms were determined through interviews with teachers and with children. Ultimately, a profile was constructed showing: (a) the extent to which children of different ages interacted with and sought one another, (b) the social, academic, and managerial nature of such child/child contacts, (c) the positive and negative nature of those child/child contacts, and (d) the extent and nature of interactions of teachers with the various ages of children.

This information was given to the staff/parent decision-making council of the school, and was used extensively in determining a modified organizational structure for grouping children. Six months later, the evaluator conducted

a follow-up study to determine the success of and satisfaction toward that modified structure.

Additional evaluation studies in the school have provided information to aid in decisions concerning recordkeeping grids used for monitoring student progress, time structures of classrooms, the program provided for five-year olds, use of interest centers, and general progress toward achieving goals of the school.

CONCLUSIONS

People trying new things cannot know whether those things will, in fact, achieve what they hope to achieve. The confusion, and multiple demands which surround such innovation often make it impossible for people to step away from the scene for a moment to take a look at what is happening, to define the source of their frustrations and the source of their satisfactions. Evaluation can serve the vital function of providing information which will support positive change toward a better program.